

## Super Sunday 2021

### Saint Mark Presbyterian Church

I love preaching on Super Bowl Sunday because every year without fail the attention, the media, the hyperbole gets bigger and bigger until only Biblical images are enough to describe the contest.

You can't miss it if you have been watching the media reports - coaches speak of taking the team to the 'promised land', key players, someone like Tom Brady come in as the saviors of their teams' seasons. Players quote the prophets to talk about how their cause is just and how they just need to 'keep the faith'.

The story line this year is focused on the two quarterbacks. One very young but talented, and one who seems to defy the aging process. Each has already been a champion so it is hard to say there is an underdog story in this one, but it is certainly a story of young verses old in some way. One will emerge victorious, the other will be reduced to a long offseason of regret.

But even though we are up to 55 on the count of Super Bowls, we have to remind ourselves that epic struggles have been going on a lot longer than that. And often the outcomes had more impact in terms of life and limb than the final score of a football contest.

That's why I love the scripture from 1 Samuel 17 in the context of America's biggest hyped event of the year - each team, each coach, each player has

One last Goliath to overcome.

Young David from our story was in an even tougher situation than either of these two quarterbacks. The Philistine giant he was about to face was even bigger than a defensive end, and talked more trash too. The Bible tells us that Goliath was 6 cubits tall - maybe close to 8 feet, with armor and helmet and spear. He was probably something like Buccaneers defensive lineman Ndamakong Suh, who is weighing in today at 313 pounds.

Intimidating? I'll say, Goliath had a better record than either team today, because he was undefeated. It is understandable that the pregame hype is all about Goliath, yet David, our hero is quietly confident. To the Israelites, a loss was unthinkable - it would mean enslavement and worse for their people. This was no ordinary contest.

Not much was going right for the Israelites as they approached game day. Their veteran leadership lacked confidence, and they turn to a raw rookie - a shepherd boy who seems utterly out of place on the field.

And all that David had to bring to the contest was his slingshot, 5 smooth stones, and a very accurate arm.

Goliath for his part was confident in the pre-game interviews. In fact, 1 Samuel quotes him as saying, "I will crush this shepherd boy, I will destroy him from the face of the earth."

When the media turned to David for his response, he remained humble. All he really said was that he would represent the Lord God - and he said, after all it is God's battle.

Expressing confidence in God, he said, "The same God who saved me from the paw of the lion and the bear will save me from this Philistine"

Now as an aside, you might know that Kansas City did not face the Bears or Lions this year, while Tampa Bay did encounter both Bears and Lions this year, but only defeated the Lions.

So you know the story - the people who gathered in the field of battle were not prepared for the shocking scene that resulted. All David did was dip into his bag of 5 smooth stones, put one in his slingshot and let it fly. The stone struck Goliath, he dropped to the ground, and David walked up took the giant's sword, and finished him off putting a bloody exclamation point to Israel's victory.

This story often reminds us that God loves to slay giants. God is always full of surprises. God often takes those who seem lowly and turns them into winners. In God's kingdom, the last are first and the servant of all is the greatest of all. The weak become strong, the poor in spirit become blessed. We know from the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 that Jesus claims the meek, the poor in spirit, the merciful, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted, those who mourn are all blessed in God's kingdom.

God often transforms those who are facing heavy odds - like young David who was given zero chance of survival - God can snatch victory out of the jaws of defeat.

Peter was in a similar situation. He had denied Jesus three times, he was in a dark place, but God transformed him into Peter the Rock. God chose Saul of Tarsus, an enemy of the followers of Christ to be the greatest evangelist and theologian of the early church, he became the Apostle Paul

Has the past year left us feeling there is always a Goliath lurking, threatening us? Where in your life or mine does that giant exist?

Even as we have some fun with the themes of this passage, there are some serious spiritual principles to take from the inspiration of young David:

1- Let God and God alone be the cornerstone of your self-esteem. The whole focus of this chapter in 1 Samuel is on Goliath. King Saul is obsessing with Goliath, the people are all focused on him, the army is terrorized by him, his size, his armor, his threats.

David, you notice is the only one who is not focused on Goliath. He is the only one in this tale who names the name of God: It is one of the great lines in the entire Old Testament in my view, from verse 26, He says "Who is this Philistine that he should defy the armies of the Living God?"

From this David concludes, the battle belongs to God, and God will give you into our hand."

Think of it this way, in contemporary terms. David did not listen to the negative critics. He was not overcome with fear or anxiety, though he surely must have felt it. He listened for God's voice. There is a risk of basing our self-worth on the voices of others around us - maybe a Boss or a family member, an editor or a critic, who says to us: You don't quite measure up -

you're not good enough or whatever the case may be. Or it could just be a voice inside of us saying we are not measuring up. Or all the pressure is on you, and if you fail it will be to the ruin of all.

Maybe you saw The New York times had an important article about parenting during the pandemic. Three young moms were interviewed, who all shared feelings of utter inadequacy for the task of being a home-school teacher, while holding down a job, and being a spouse and a parent during all of this. Probably everyone is experiencing something like this. We need to understand our self-worth is measured as children of God, not as how well we are doing managing the crisis. Tell yourself, I am a child of God. This is a historic pandemic. You are doing fine.

It is hard for sure, but to be inspired by David, base your self-esteem in God.

2- When we do that, we can be free to be ourselves.

It is so fascinating in this story. King Saul assumes David needs to be like all the previous generations of warriors. In order to be a success. It is a reasonable thought. So, he loads David up with heavy armor - the helmet, the shield, the coat, the sword, all that stuff. And David just says, "This isn't me."

Young David tells Saul, I have to be myself. So he took off all of that armor which is weighing him down. He relied on his skill and speciality, the slingshot. And before we feel too sorry for the young shepherd boy, remember that good shepherds were very accurate with a slingshot. Sheep could wander away, and to get them moving in the right direction, a shepherd would

fire a stone on one side of them to get them to turn and come back the right way.

From our standpoint David doesn't have much going for him. But from David's view, Goliath was so big, how could he miss?

There was a wonderful book by Eugene Peterson called "5 Smooth Stones for Ministry". He asks, when it comes time for us to serve God, what is in our little bag that is unique to us? What unique skills has God placed there for us? What are those 5 smooth stones that you and I have?

We might hear a negative voice saying, it is impossible, you are too big or too small too young or too old. But look at what you have to use.

God encourages us to be ourselves.

3- God will help us face any Goliath in life.

John Knox of Scotland coined the phrase "One person with God is always a majority"

And C.S. Lewis said "There is no situation that I will face today which God and I can't handle together."

You know when David grew up and eventually became King, he faced even greater Goliaths. He began to think he was above the law of God, above it all.

He takes advantage of his power, and has the husband of a woman killed in battle, then takes her for himself.

And Nathan the prophet confronts David with this monstrous Goliath of his own creation. David realizes the maze of lies and murder he got into. Sometimes it is a Goliath of our own making which is more formidable than just an 8 foot tall gladiator.

But yet, in spite of that

David is called a "Man after God's own heart"?

Do you know why that is? Not, I believe because he won that Super Bowl Gladiator contest that day.

Rather because he could slay the gladiator within. After Nathan confronts him, Psalm 51 records David's honesty with God:

"Have mercy on me O God, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me."

When David was honest with God, he could even defeat the Goliath within.

Whatever this year brings to us, may that be so for us as well.

May God bless us as we face both the Goliaths from without and within.

With God's help, one little stone can do the trick. That is the word of God.

Thanks be to God. Amen.